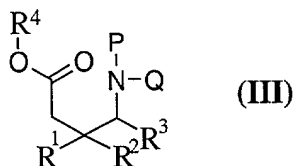


CLAIMS:

1. A compound of the formula (III)



5

in which:

P is hydrogen or methyl;

Q is a labile amine- or amide-forming organic group that becomes
 10 removed in the human or animal body;

R¹ is straight or branched C₂ – C₆ alkyl, C₃ – C₆ cycloalkyl or phenyl;

R² is hydrogen or methyl; and

R³ is hydrogen, methyl or carboxyl; and

R⁴ is hydrogen or a labile ester-forming group selected from substituted
 15 and unsubstituted C₁ – C₆ alkyl, benzyl and phenyl groups that become removed
 in the human or animal body,

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt of any salt-forming compound within
 the above class,

but excluding compounds in which R₁ is phenyl and R², R³ and R⁴ are
 20 each hydrogen.

2. The compound of claim 1, in which R⁴ is hydrogen.

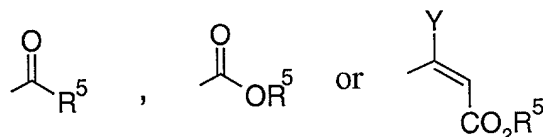
3. The compound of claim 1, in which R⁴ is other than hydrogen and is more
 25 labile than Q.

4. The compound of claim 3, in which R⁴ is methyl or *t*-butyl.

5. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q can be removed hydrolytically under physiological conditions.

6. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q can be removed enzymatically under physiological conditions.

7. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q is



10

in which:

R^5 is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_6$ alkyl, phenyl or benzyl in which the benzene ring may be substituted or unsubstituted; and

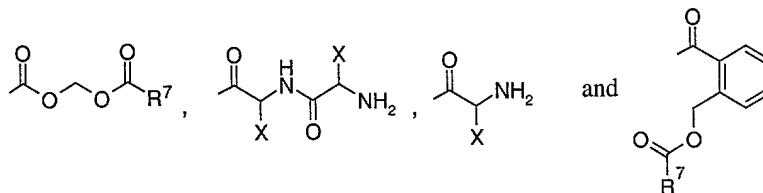
Y is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_6$ alkyl, or $-\text{CH}_2\text{CO}_2\text{R}^6$ in which R^6 represents straight or branched chain $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_6$ alkyl.

15

8. The compound of claim 7, wherein R^5 represents *t*-butyl, benzyl or phenyl.

9. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q is selected from

20

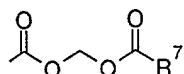


in which:

R^7 is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_6$ alkyl, phenyl or benzyl in which either or each benzene ring may be substituted or unsubstituted; and

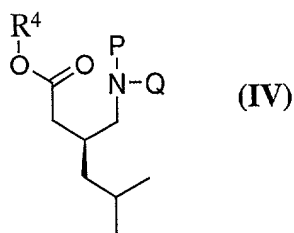
25 X represents a phenyl group or any of the side chains of the 20 naturally encoded α -amino acids.

10. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q is



wherein R⁷ is methyl, *t*-butyl or phenyl.

5 11. A compound of the formula (IV)



10 in which P, Q and R⁴ have the meanings given in claim 1, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt of any salt-forming compound within the above class.

12. The compound of claim 11, in which R⁴ is hydrogen.

15 13. The compound of claim 11, in which R⁴ is other than hydrogen and is more labile than Q.

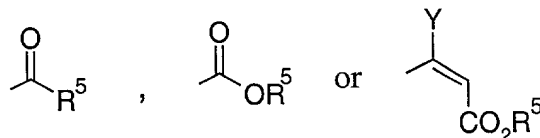
14. The compound of claim 13, in which R⁴ is methyl or *t*-butyl.

20 15. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q can be removed hydrolytically under physiological conditions.

16. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q can be removed enzymatically under physiological conditions.

25

17. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q is



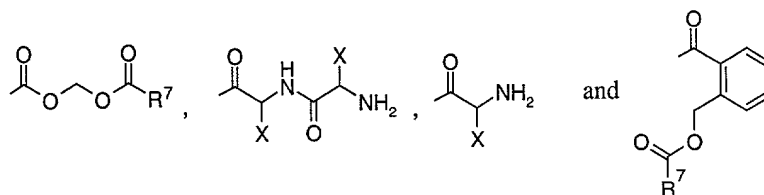
in which:

R^5 is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_6$ alkyl, phenyl or benzyl
 5 in which the benzene ring may be substituted or unsubstituted; and

Y is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_6$ alkyl, or $-\text{CH}_2\text{CO}_2\text{R}^6$ in
 which R^6 represents straight or branched chain $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_6$ alkyl.

18. The compound of claim 17, wherein R^5 represents *t*-butyl, benzyl or
 10 phenyl.

19. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q is selected from



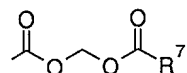
15 in which:

R^7 is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_6$ alkyl, phenyl or benzyl
 in which either or each benzene ring may be substituted or unsubstituted; and

X represents a phenyl group or any of the side chains of the 20 naturally
 encoded α -amino acids.

20

20. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q is



wherein R^7 is methyl, *t*-butyl or phenyl.

25 21. A compound selected from

(S)-3-(Benzoylaminomethyl)-5-methylhexanoic acid;

(S)-Benzyl 3-(acylaminomethyl)-5-methylhexanoate;

(S)-3-[N-(acetoxymethyleneoxycarbonyl)aminomethyl]-5-methylhexanoic acid;

5 (S)-3-[N-((2,2-dimethylpropionyloxy)methyleneoxycarbonyl)-aminomethyl]-5-methylhexanoic acid;

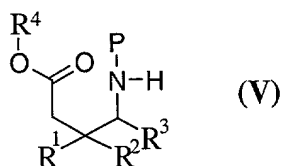
(S)-3-[N-(benzoyloxymethyleneoxycarbonyl)aminomethyl]-5-methylhexanoic acid; and

pharmaceutically acceptable salts of any of the above.

10

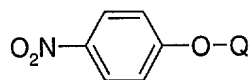
22. A method for making a compound of the formula (III) or salt thereof, as defined in claim 1, above, which comprises:

coupling a compound of the formula:



15

in which P and R¹ – R⁴ have the meanings given in claim 1 and in which said compound is in the form of a free base or an ammonium salt with a compound of the formula



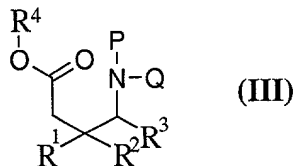
20

or QCl where Q has the meaning given in claim 1.

23. The method of claim 22, in which the compound (V) is a carboxylic acid and comprising the further step of esterifying the carboxyl group with a substituted or unsubstituted C₁ – C₆ alkanol, benzyl alcohol or phenol.

25

24. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier and a therapeutically effective amount of a compound of the formula (III)



in which:

5 P is hydrogen or methyl;

Q is a labile amine- or amide-forming organic group that becomes removed in the human or animal body;

R¹ is straight or branched C₂ – C₆ alkyl, C₃ – C₆ cycloalkyl or phenyl;

R² is hydrogen or methyl; and

10 R³ is hydrogen, methyl or carboxyl; and

R⁴ is hydrogen or a labile ester-forming group selected from substituted and unsubstituted C₁ – C₆ alkyl, benzyl and phenyl groups that become removed in the human or animal body,

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt of any salt-forming compound within
15 the above class,

but excluding compounds in which R₁ is phenyl and R², R³ and R⁴ are each hydrogen.

25. A method for treating epilepsy comprising administering a therapeutically
20 effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

26. A method for treating faintness attacks, hypokinesia and cranial disorders comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound
25 according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

27. A method for treating a neurodegenerative disorder comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

28. A method for treating depression comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

5

29. A method for treating anxiety comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

10 30. A method for treating panic comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

15 31. A method for treating pain comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

20 32. A method for treating a neuropathological disorder comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

33. A method for treating digestive disorder comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

25